

Knowledge after the End of Nature: A Critical Approach to Allen’s Concept of Artifactuality


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Abstract: Barry Allen’s criticism of the traditional definition of knowledge seems to share a radical tone with Stephan Vogel’s concerns about the customary representation of the causes that lie behind our current environmental problems. Both philosophers voice their complaints about the Cartesian picture of the world and dismiss the core idea behind the notorious duality embedded in that picture. What they propose instead is a monistic perspective positing an artifactual networking. In this paper, I will try to draw attention to certain weak aspects of Allen’s refreshing description of knowledge as “superlative artifactual performance” and offer a way to improve that characterization via Vogel’s notion “wildness”. More specifically, I will propose a solution to the problems pertaining to the distinction between good and bad artifacts with respect to the epistemic criteria proposed by Allen, and claim that the temporal gap standing in between the expectations of a designer and the qualities of her design may contribute to our understanding of the nature of an artifact. I maintain that each creative attempt to know a given artifact is to be appreciated by recognizing its different uses. In doing so, I will also try to show why and how certain bad artifacts get their undesirable status because of leading up to techno-cultural stagnation.

Keywords: Allen; artifactuality; knowledge; use-value; Vogel; wildness.

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1. Introduction

In his *Thinking like a Mall: Environmental Philosophy after the End of Nature*, Stephen Vogel (2015) provides a discussion regarding the current status of nature, the environmental problems caused by human harm to nature and the ethical issues raised on this ground. The debate is of importance as it concerns not only the philosophers of environmental ethics but also any thinker entertaining similar questions about humans' responsibility in reflecting over and assessing the current situation of their environment. Epistemology, as well as environmental philosophy in general, is keen to point out the fallible presuppositions of humans resulted from their oblivion to the outside world and this situation creates a noteworthy partnership between these two branches of philosophy. Since the original claim pertaining to the end of nature belongs to the environmentalist group, my strategy in writing this paper first of all will be to adapt their evaluation about the hegemony of artifacts to the domain of epistemology. Secondly, I will point out how their attitude bears similarities to the observations made by Barry Allen with respect to the objects of knowledge—which he deems to be thoroughly artificial by definition. Finally, an attempt will be made to open a discursive channel by which these two philosophical matters can communicate.

At the very outset, one point should be clarified. I will not argue that epistemology and environmental philosophy are foreign to each other or pretend that I am the first one to broach the issue of collaboration. Rather, my principal aim is to contribute to an already established dialogue with a specific purpose. I will attempt to enhance Allen's four criteria [appropriateness to use, quality of design, fecundity, and symbiosis (Allen 2004, 72-74)], which are spelled out to assess whether our attempts to know are performed superlatively in the light of Vogel's views about the nature of artifacts. I regard the main purpose of this paper as constructing a common ground for defining any form of the knowledge that might be defended in the post-naturalist philosophy and proposing an understanding which may help us to separate the good artifacts that we generate by the act of knowing from bad ones. In this way, I hope to improve Allen's definition of "knowledge" as the superlative performance with artifacts (Allen 2004, 72)

by means of Vogel's definition of "wildness"—which resides in the gap between the intention of a builder and the consequences of her artifact (Vogel 2015, 113). Since Allen's principles appear in certain cases to be less than decisive to label some instances of knowledge to be "bad artifacts" as seen in the examples of Auschwitz or atomic bombs, I am inclined to think that importing certain ideas from another trend of philosophy to fully develop his assessment might prove philosophically fruitful.

Thus, I will commence my treatment by analyzing Vogel's rejection of the Cartesian picture of nature, which is the duality between the human and the non-human worlds. Lying at the center of his critical view is the idea of defining nature through an exclusion of human existence. I will try to offer a detailed perspective on his suggestion about the re-establishment of the relation between humans and nature, and the reconstruction of their worlds on a common ground where nothing can escape being artificial. Secondly, I will provide a construal of his Heideggerian thesis about the end of nature—which is the logical and ontological impossibility of encountering an untouched landscape. Originally, the view that the nature has already ended by human destruction belongs to another environmental philosopher, Bill McKibben (1989). The genuine contribution of Vogel to his claim is that the end of nature is not a recent occurrence. Rather nature has *always* already ended (Vogel 2015, 25). I will scrutinize the epistemic consequences of such a judgment later in this paper. Thirdly, I will show how Vogel's and Allen's reflections about the current stage of the civilized world are alike in certain significant ways. Although they develop their ideas in different areas of philosophy, they both take "web of artifacts" as the launching point of their inquiry. I will devote more space to Allen's opinions in the pertinent section and will endeavor to elaborate his creative understanding of the act of knowing. With an aim to shed light on certain problematic aspects of his representation of knowledge and to offer a way to improve it, I will propose a solution supported by Vogel's Derridean concept of "wildness" which is characterized as a temporal gap between the intention of the builder and the resulted qualities of the artifact (Vogel 2015, 113). More broadly, I hope to strengthen the hand of a refreshing standpoint about the problem of knowledge and to contribute to the ever-lasting process of eliminating defects of a promising theory.

2. Is there anything left that is natural?

In *Thinking like a Mall*, Vogel challenges the validity of the well-established dualism between nature and humans in environmental philosophy, a strategic move aimed at rendering agents responsible for their damage to nature. He maintains that there is something unsatisfactory about the whole controversy about the nature-human tension as he thinks that the term ‘nature’ is too ambiguous to be a reference point for positing (indirectly) what is not natural. The term has multiple meanings, and so is too unstable to be the main basis of the whole debate about the sources of our environmental problems.

Each attempt to define nature falls prey to counterexamples that lead the definer to complain “no, that’s not what I meant,” and then to redefine the term yet again, in an ongoing dialectic that leaves one wondering at the end whether any clear sense can be made of the term at all. (Vogel 2015, 9)

The difficulty in giving an analytic definition to the concept “nature” is just the tip of the iceberg. When nature is examined ontologically, another and a more significant issue arises, to wit, the double nature of the term where we seem to have incompatible readings. Vogel approaches this problem by formulating the relationship between humans and nature depending on two different modes of being or states of nature. In one state, nature ontologically excludes humans on account of their capability of producing something unnatural. Consequently, by definition the human world turns out to be unnatural. In the other state or mode, nature encompasses humans because of their subjection to similar processes in evolution with other living beings. Thus, the human world is characterized to be inseparable from nature by definition.

Vogel benefits from John Stuart Mill’s distinction in his *Nature* (1998) to familiarize the reader with his own analysis about the “double nature” of the term ‘nature’. As Mill argues, in its first sense, nature stands for “the entire system of things, with the aggregates of all their properties”; and in its second sense, it denotes “things as they would be, apart from human intervention” (Mill 1998, 64). Similarly, Vogel assigns a word to each sense and employs the name ‘Nature’ (with capitalization) for “the totality of

physical world”, while “the nonhuman world” is called ‘nature’ with lower-case (Vogel 2015, 13). In this division, on the one hand, humans are benevolently depicted as the part of “Nature”; on the other hand, they are pictured as beings endangering “nature” violently enough to bring it to a dramatic end. Evidently, a problem occurs at this picture. The former definition causes a blatantly incorrect characterization of humans because their actions are identified as incapable of harming nature. The latter definition of nature is also odd because it gives the impression of implausibly relinquishing the lawful control of “nature” over to humans and almost granting them the freedom of doing whatever they want in their own “un-natural” world. In a nutshell, it removes human culpability vis-à-vis affecting and transforming “nature”. Due to the logically, ontologically and ethically untenable implications of the dualistic representation of nature and humans, Vogel defends a monist perspective.¹ He marks each and every thing as unnatural or artificial, and constructs all other arguments on this unity in negation. Our presence in nature has *always* already transformed it into a built one (Vogel 2015, 29-30). All we can observe and experience is the artificialized or “built” environment.

3. Is there anything left that is natural to know?

Vogel’s claim about ending nature by artificializing it and being obliged to live in post-naturalist environment has roots in the ideas of Bill McKibben. As the latter writer puts it:

When I say that we have ended nature, I don’t mean, obviously, that natural processes have ceased—there is still sunshine and

¹ Latour defends a similar position about the relationship between humans and non-humans in his *Politics of Nature* (2004). Nature and society are characterized as “two houses of a single collective”, and the public life is organized in their association or intersection. Similarly, he advises that ecology focus on this common world instead of solely dealing with nature. This differs from Vogel’s view because we are still talking about the areas where members of these two houses do not interact. Let me take this opportunity to thank the referee of *Organon F* for pointing out the relevance of Latour’s work to my paper.

still wind, still growth, still decay. Photosynthesis continues, as does respiration. *But we have ended the thing that has, at least in modern times, defined nature for us—its separation from human society.* (McKibben 1989, 64; emphasis in original)

It must be noted here that while McKibben contends that the nature is ended, he does not maintain that the damage caused by humans on nature cannot be undone. In that sense, for instance, some technologies which are geared towards preventing pollution or stopping global warming can still be utilized. However, even though we, as humans, are able to restore nature perfectly, this act to turn something into its original state will be a human artifact, and so will become unnatural anyway. We are not able to intervene with or relate to nature without transforming it in human ways. Or to put it differently, we cannot escape artificializing nature as long as we act in it.

McKibben's illustration of the end of nature can be simplified via an analogy comparing human relationship with nature to the touch of Midas (Vogel 2015, 11). The human touch alters nature every time agents establish some relationship with it or even they direct their attention to it. For Vogel, the history of this transformative relationship between humans and nature is as ancient as the history of human beings. The phenomenon of ending nature is not a recent event as it is popularly believed. As he says, "human beings have always transformed the world they encounter, and they transform it *in* encountering it, a fact that might well be part of their 'nature'" (Vogel 2015, 25). This shows us that the search for lands which have not been touched by humans, or by Midas metaphorically, is a "fetish" practiced by the dreamers of *wilderness*.² The reality does not correspond to the dreamers' frozen image of nature. The nature is not a *nature morte* or a thing that we can fix in an immutable state. Thus, it is conceptually

² *Wilderness* is a term which means "a tract or region uncultivated and uninhabited by human beings" (Merriam-Webster). The term also denotes the slogan of an eco-friendly act in 1964, which carried out protests for protecting pristine areas and for letting nature be. Later, the term also designated a long debate in environmental philosophy. The proponents of the wilderness are mainly criticized by J. Baird Callicott who argues for the replacement of this idea with a more realistic and still objective norm of "biodiversity". My objection to the idea of wilderness is basically a reflection of his *A Critique of and An Alternative to the Wilderness Idea* (1994).

and ontologically impossible to confront a piece of the Earth and to declare that it is un-touched, wild. The radical outcome of this reasoning is to drop the concept of nature for good in environmental theory and find another, a less objective standard (Vogel 2015, 28). For Vogel, there is no need to abstain from accepting an anthropocentric norm for the ethical foundation because the real source of our current environmental problems is not more but, rather, *less emphasis* on humans. Therefore, we should “develop an environmental ethic, and an environmental philosophy, that take the environment (a word that simply means ‘what surrounds us’) to be the built one we actually inhabit” and we should not be concerned with nature at all (Vogel 2015, 30).

Similar to Vogel’s critique of “nature” in environmental theory, Barry Allen questions the effectiveness of preserving “truth” in epistemology. He disputes the adequacy of representational theories of knowledge which divide knowledge into two as *knowing-that* and *knowing-how*, allowing only the former to enter the territory of genuine knowledge (Allen 2008, 35). In a nutshell, the knowledge of “how” is characterized via our talents and habits such as knowing how to swim or to withdraw money from an ATM machine. These non-representational, non-verbal forms of knowledge are not truth-assignable which means that they can be neither true nor false. Moreover, this is evidently the reason why they are not exactly the favorite subject matter of those philosophers who build a notable career around the notion of propositional truth. The received view has it that in a significant sense (propositional) knowledge involves truth-value attributions in representational contexts. According to this logocentric approach, knowledge is designated as a thing which has a “true” essence and the representations of knowledge are assessed depending on whether they bear this essence or not. In parallel with Vogel’s rejection of Cartesian duality between humans and nature, Allen asserts that this dichotomy of knowledge is not helpful because it prevents us to appreciate the value in *know-how* and it forces us to acknowledge only one-sided knowledge acquisition (Allen 2008, 36).

Our adventures of inventing knowledge have an evolutionary story according to Allen’s reading. Human journey to “know” in sophisticated cultural contexts through artifacts has been continuing for about 40,000 years. We have been eliminating the predictable, habitual or ordinary

aspects of our activity as we progressively refined our ways of preferring and selecting. In this way, we have managed to connect to surrounding things with which we are constantly engaged and whose reality only matters—i.e. quite simply, artifacts. Our knowledge turned into “a cultivated capacity for eliciting, creating, and amplifying superlative performance in artifacts”.

It is important that the performance be superlative, meaning not literally or uniquely *the* best, but *of* the best, among the best, at that rank. Knowledge, like art, can be found only in the best examples. Only superior performance necessarily implies knowledge. (Allen 2004, 62)

Contrary to the classical view in epistemology which qualifies knowledge through its reliability, he contends that knowledge actually necessitates a more refined and originality-based standard (Allen 2004, 67). Since we also treat our habits as reliable, reliability cannot be an adequate test for our performances to know. In that sense, our performances involving knowledge must set their own principles in each and every instance, and they must be assessed without requiring an isomorphism. However, another question deserves our attention at this point. What should be our reference in appraising the worth of the thing to be known? According to Allen, our environment is “saturated with artifacts” and their quality may only be evaluated by those who can understand how they function (Allen 2004, 88). We are surrounded by a network of artifacts which “presuppose each other, produce each other, work with and upon each other, in a web of interdependence now practically coextensive with the global human ecology” (Allen 2004, 64). This complex structure whose components operate in a concordant and co-dependent manner is the very condition of our knowledge.

4. Knowing the artifact by recognizing its wildness

As stated in the previous section, viewed from Allen’s epistemological perspective, knowledge determines its own standard of appraisal. It is important to notice that this style in epistemology does not necessarily entail that we cannot have some objective parameters to judge knowledge. Some

criteria can still be formulated if we let knowledge to decide them with reference to its own “traditions” of accomplishment. Allen lists four dimensions on which we can confirm that a given performance as an artifact deserves to be called “superlative” or “good” in character, which are appropriateness to use, quality of design, fecundity, and symbiosis (Allen 2004, 72). First of all, an artifact can be evaluated in terms of being user-friendly or not. Its adequacy in performing the task that it is designed to do is a crucial specification. Secondly, the design of the artifact should be authentic. Being useful or being functional, on its own, is not enough to qualify an artifact as the superlative form of achievement. Thirdly, an artifact should be the source of productiveness and should inspire others within the related fields to innovate. The richness in content and diversity in the application area bring advantages to an artifact, and enable it to offer new opportunities for the use different than its originally defined function. Lastly, the value of the artifact is proportional to the complexity of the relationship that it establishes with other artifacts. If an artifact is successful in making mutually beneficial connections with its environment, it becomes an irreplaceable artifact. These qualifications bestow a special epistemological status to the objects of the world as to render that world an artifactual one.

Allen makes an open-ended list to exemplify the “good” artifacts, which satisfy all four criteria and manage to pass the test of excellence, and to distinguish them from the “bad” artifacts (Allen 2004, 73). The artifacts such as the writing, the sailing ship and the penicillin are designated as the accomplishments of knowledge, and so labeled as good. However, the guillotine, the atomic bomb and Auschwitz are characterized as bad artifacts due to the fact that they fail the test by violating at least one criterion of superlative artifactual performance. For instance, guillotine contradicts with at least two criteria, which are fecundity and symbiosis. The function of guillotine is limited to kill and it does benefit the person who uses it (the executioner) but not the one for whom it is used (the executed). Thus, the guillotine as an artifact is neither productive nor capable to establish mutually beneficial relationships. In a nutshell, it falls under the category of bad artifacts.

As Allen argues, evaluating an artifact sometimes becomes more complicated and requires a more detailed reasoning. The existence of such

perplexing examples seems to cause a paradox, and so poses a threat for the integrity of the test. Auschwitz is one of these obscure artifacts (Allen 2004, 74). When we put aside all cruelty and malice in the concentration camps and focus only on the technique, expertise and engineering which turned out to be necessary for the mass destruction, we may claim that Auschwitz is a superlative artifactual performance. However, making such a reduction would be cold-blooded as well as illegitimate because of breaking the relation of an event with its historical context. Therefore, it would be more appropriate to approach such events found in our collective memory as a unified phenomenon without isolating it from the values that historically burden it positively or negatively. Allen prefers analyzing this artifact specifically at the onto-epistemological level instead of conducting a discussion that incorporates the moral and political aspects of Auschwitz as well. His final decision about the quality of Auschwitz is negative because he asserts that “the camp was knowledge against itself” (Allen 2004, 74). The power gained by knowledge was used for destroying the ground which the knowledge requires to retain its sense of accomplishment. In that sense, Auschwitz cannot be acknowledged as a superlative artifactual performance because it violates a very basic principle, i.e. self-preservation.

Although Allen speaks to our conscience while listing Auschwitz under the label of “bad artifacts” one may still doubt the coherence of the logic which leads him to make this judgment. A reasonable objection in this context may be formulated as follows: Any instance of knowledge can be used to destroy itself, i.e. its own modes of generation. If self-destruction is to be conceived as a breach within the maxims of superlativeness, none of the examples of knowledge, including good artifacts, are exempt from this perilous prospect. Furthermore, self-annihilation should be reckoned as a capacity which is not inherent to the artifact; rather, it shows itself through its use-value. Even though the artifact performs exceptionally and appears to turn itself into a unit of knowledge, this does not necessarily mean the end of the story with respect to its criteria of qualification. In spite of the fact that an artifact is reasonably situated within a web of artifactual items, its place (and, thus, artifactual “goodness”) may actually vary considerably depending on its current functional characteristics. Each new experience of its utility contributes to the total value of the artifact and alters its depiction.

A performance or act of knowledge can be evaluated negatively or positively depending on the intentions of those who transform the nature of artifact in question through their utilization. As for the example of Auschwitz, the totality of expertise, procedural techniques, and clusters of information can obviously be alleged to count as “knowledge”. Nevertheless, the main reason why those factors should not be deemed sufficient for such labeling is actually not due to some property of the artifact. Allen’s own reasoning in this context (viz. that in case of Auschwitz the end product stands against itself) is inadequate to constitute a negative instance; rather, one must contend that *the use of* artifact leading particularly to Auschwitz (combining the knowledge collected from different fields within the performance of mass destruction) actually causes the issue here. In that sense, the quality negating the superlative form should *not* be regarded as inherent to the accomplishment of an artifact but, rather, *external* to it. The manifestation and embodiment of the artifact in the form of Auschwitz assigns a negatively loaded history to it. However, as this exemplification is contingent to the nature of the artifact, it does not inherently need to address the evilness entangled with its epistemic characteristic.

Hence, my critique of Allen’s evaluation of the example of Auschwitz posits a difference between the quality in the character of the artifact and the quality of the value in its use. These two senses are attributed to the artifact at different “stages”. While the former is ascribed *before* (*antecedent to*) the artifact’s expressing knowledge, the latter is assigned *after* (*posterior to*) the artifact’s being expressed superlatively. This temporal gap between the distinctive types of qualifying an artifact can be understood as a version of what Stephen Vogel denotes as *wildness*.³ He originally defines this unbridgeable gap between the intention of the builder and the properties of what is built. My intention, in the context of the critique offered here, is to employ Vogel’s insight and try to gesture at a critical rift between

³ This term ‘wildness’ should be distinguished from the term ‘wilderness’ (Vogel 2015, 111). The former concept views the environment as a dynamic entity and appreciates the unpredictability or the creativity in its restoration. The latter concept, however, values not the whole environment, but rather merely the natural one. It picturizes this specific part of the environment as something stable, and so is against any sort of restoration of it.

the *characteristic of the artifact* and *its use-value*. To elucidate the definition of the concept, we can refer to Vogel's own writings:

There is a gap, in the construction of every artifact, between the intention with which the builder acts and the consequences of her acts, a gap that is ineliminable and indeed constitutive of what it is to construct something; and in this gap resides something like what I earlier called wildness. And that gap, as I have just been suggesting, is not only the one between what we intend in our actions and the unintended consequences those actions nonetheless inevitably bring about but rather, and perhaps more important, it is there between our actions and their *intended* consequences, too, arising even when the object produced seems to turn out in just the way we had planned. It is a *temporal* gap, what Derrida would call a deferral, for even the successful execution of a plan requires, indeed depends upon, *waiting* for something that goes beyond the planning and beyond even the acts that put the plan into motion. (Vogel 2015, 113; emphasis in original)

As Vogel clearly states, some traits of artifacts are neither intended nor anticipated by their designers. In such examples, the nature of the artifact *exceeds* the intention of its designer. This specific quality of the artifact seems to have obvious connotations of *creativity* (Vogel 2015, 105).⁴ As a matter of fact, occasionally the consequences become a surprise for the user as well. After the artifact is introduced into the “market” or is made public, some secondary–non-constitutive–values can be bestowed upon it through its use. I think the quality of knowledge to destroy its own existence is such a value.

Vogel's concept “wildness” would not be entirely foreign to Allen. His claim about the *intransitive* character of expressing an artifact bears

⁴ I think this sense of creativity is very similar to Allen's description of the accomplishment of knowledge (Allen 2004, 68). He emphasizes the role of elegance and innovation in denoting something as knowledge. He also exemplifies his view with a reference to the use of a paper clip. When we use it as a device to hold the sheets of a notebook together, we cannot be said to be exercising the capacity of human knowledge in the most appropriate way. Only when we use it creatively, for instance using a paper clip as an antenna, we may speak of the knowledge.

certain resemblances to Vogel's notion of wildness. Allen maintains that the artifactual expressions are "impersonal" in the sense that they do not "express a physical state first arising in the maker's soul" (Allen 2008, 38). He names this feature of expression specific to artifacts "intransitive expression":

That is what aesthetic theory calls *intransitive* expression. Expression is transitive when it refers to an object, typically an emotional state of the maker [...]. When it comes to artifacts expression becomes intransitive. Like an intransitive verb, an expressive artifact doesn't require an "object," that is, psychological state of the maker that it transitively expresses. Intransitive, artifactual expressiveness *begins with the work*. It depends on how artifact is assembled, how it looks, not what the maker feels. (Allen 2008, 39)

Allen's "psychological state of the maker" is similar to Vogel's "intention of the builder", and neither Allen nor Vogel treats it as the unique determinant of the character of an artifact. Consequently, there is a significant discursive ground shared by Vogel and Allen. In this context, let me suggest another aspect of the matter in order to facilitate assessing the quality of the artifacts—call it "*modified* wildness". By slightly differing from Vogel's definition, I describe *wildness* as the temporal gap between the original expression of the artifact and its modified expressions-in-use. I am inclined to take the values which are assigned to the artifact posterior to its expression as fully open-ended rather than determined. The values may change in accordance with how artifacts are put into use by people. The use of technical knowledge may give rise to catastrophic consequences as in the example of Auschwitz. Knowledge of chemistry may turn into a deadly weapon in its use for atomic bombs. In these examples, the user's expectation in the conversion of information more or less overlaps with the results. However, this may not always be the case and the outcomes of the modification may be too hard to estimate even for the user. For instance, the newly discovered radium element was declared a benign artifact in the 1910s and expanded its market during the following years, including cosmetics and food sectors. Further investigation proved that radioactive products involved considerable risks, and so the radium as a fecund artifact lost its attraction with

regard to its performative competitiveness in that field. This shows us that an artifact always retains its propensity for change; so that the user who intends to modify it must anticipate some surprise by virtue of the alterations she affects. In that sense, each and every use can be regarded an attempt to know with the proviso that some of them deserve to be called “creative”.

5. Conclusion

What I have tried to accomplish in this paper can be characterized as a supplement to Allen’s theory of knowledge with an aim to elaborate the idea of artifactual networking in our techno-social world. In my opinion, Vogel’s anthropocentric post-naturalist environmental theory prepares a fertile ground for a variation on Allen’s definition of knowledge as humans’ superlative performance with artifacts. I tend to think that Vogel fruitfully names a notion we do come across in the unorthodox view of Allen, to wit, *wildness*. This rift standing between the intentions of the person who builds the artifact and the potentiality that the artifact possesses at the end reveals a weak side of the standards proposed by Allen to define human knowledge. The separation of artifacts as good and bad according to Allen’s criteria becomes blurry in cases where the knowledge gained through superlative performances is re-expressed regardless of the authentic nature of the artifact and the intentionality of the inventor. This observation does not presuppose that there is an essence defining each artifact or that the initiatives to alter it cause this gap. On the contrary, this gap is inevitable due to the temporal difference between the conditions shaping the objectives of the designer and the circumstances defining the product. The resultant picture leads us to the following thesis: The *wildness* gains its full meaning and significance in the fact that the artifact unavoidably gains new qualities through its uses. Therefore, the richness in the expressions of the artifact increases in proportion to the diversity in its use. If we believe in the merits of Occam’s razor on this matter, we cannot in my opinion regard every single use transforming an artifact as the postulation of a brand new artifact. Rather, the emphasis must be placed on the abundance in the ways of attaining the superlative performance, and the

instances of alterations in usage should be collected under a common title—which defines the dynamic nature of the artifact comprehensively through developing a projection on both its anterior and possibly posterior expressions.

Lastly, I would like to consider and respond to a *prima facie* strong potential objection. One may question why we should wait for the “posterior” effects of Auschwitz to surface in order to declare that it is in fact a bad artifact. Given the atrocious outcomes of concentration camps, it may seem obviously misguided to suggest that one has to wait to see the results of their utilization in order to reach a decision about their quality as artifacts. Furthermore, one may justifiably argue that even the “antecedent” nature of such an artifact should suffice to label it as having extremely poor quality within the boundaries of the notion of “being superlative”. My concise response to this objection is that it seems both logically sound and politically correct to insist that the hypothetical “value” of the knowledge of Auschwitz can never be intrinsic but rather is always instrumental. When it is under consideration as a candidate of “knowledge” in the sense explained in this paper, the value it may be alleged to possess has never been inherent in the material elements of Auschwitz. I believe that this historical case is inevitably to be catalogued as good or bad *for* what it was meant to lead to—i.e. massacring of millions of people. In that context, it was doomed to fail as superlative performance as it must be qualified over what and how it was *used for*.

The crucial point is that Auschwitz’s antecedent and posterior characteristics are inseparable because its *raison d’être* precisely coincides with its use. Auschwitz was *inter alia* a historical phenomenon which yielded a form of knowledge which was compatible with a certain use, to wit, mass destruction. The antecedent and posterior qualities of Auschwitz are equated at the stage of *utilization* in such a manner that the product halts at a level of techno-cultural stagnation. In a nutshell, it petrifies and taints its “value”. This is to be contrasted with the usage of artifacts such as penicillin or computer. In those “good” examples, there is still a risk of being abused through bad uses in the future. They may be manipulated to turn out to be biological weapons or Terminators. However, given that in case of the *original* emergence of items like penicillin the associated practices define

a field of “superlative performativity” in the sense of Allen’s criteria for proper knowledge, the badly transformed artifacts clearly fail vis-à-vis some of those (e.g. symbiosis). Each particular use of an artifact transforms the pertinent nexus encompassing other artifacts. Consequently, when we pass judgment on the knowledge-value of an artifact like Auschwitz, we cannot focus merely on the technical properties of such a construct (e.g. in terms of its material quality or efficiency) and talk about its adequacy within certain narrow operational parameters. The net upshot of these considerations is that Auschwitz proves to be a poor exemplification of “superlative artifactual performance” despite the fact that out of the ingenuity of some engineers, the whole project, hypothetically speaking, could possibly be made to “function better” in its presupposed purpose of mass destruction.

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